

Our public works division rocks

Tropical storms and hurricanes are the most probable natural cause of a major emergency or disaster in the town of Bluffton.

The following are critical assumptions, several of which were realities during Hurricane Matthew:

- All visitors and residents will not evacuate.
- Areas of roads in Bluffton will be deemed impassable due to flood waters, debris or fire/rescue operations.
- Utilities (power, water, telephone) will be down for 24-72 hours (or longer).
- The location of the town office will be inaccessible due to flood waters.
- All requests for assistance (law enforcement, fire suppression, rescue, medical assistance, structural repair, etc.) may have to be handled initially by town resources only.
- Routine provisions will become a town concern (shelter, food, water, sanitary necessities, etc.).

The primary mission of the town of Bluffton public works division during an emergency is to support response and recovery actions for the town and its citizens and visitors.

Prior to any emergency, and particularly prior to hurricane season, public works staff conducts the following in preparation:

- Current with the appropriate disaster management plans.
- Ensures that appropriate supplies have been procured and stored (food, water, batteries, paper products, etc.).
- Tests equipment throughout the season to ensure each item is operational.
- Reviews activities, roles and responsibilities, employee destinations, assignments and contact information.
- Fuels up all vehicles each Friday.
- Inventories supplies.
- Verifies contracts with vendors/contractors, etc.
- Videos/takes photographs of all town facilities.
- Prepares emergency kits.
- Completes National Incident Management System required courses.
- Drainage channels/ditch inspection and maintenance.

Upon notice of evacuation, public works staff performed the following actions:

- Notify vendors/contractors of possible storm.
- Pack items/records to be evacuated.
- Secure all Town Hall facilities, parks and common areas.
- Pick up rental trucks/trailers.
- Distribute bins/plastic/supplies to town facilities.
- Prepare for setup of cots and other logistics.
- Secure loose items at parks/facilities and Old Town.
- Position heavy equipment as needed.
- Pack items/records to be evacuated and move to designated off-site location as necessary.
- Ensure that Law Enforcement Center and public works are prepared for re-entry.

Saturday morning at 9 a.m., public works staff began and continues to perform the following activities:

- Mobilized to begin emergency road clearing and cutting downed trees and debris throughout Bluffton.
- Post-event inspections and preliminary damage assessments of town facilities.
- Procured contractors to remove hazardous leaning trees and hanging limbs at Oyster Factory Park, Oscar Frazier Park and Town Hall.
- Procured debris hauling contractor to mobilize dumpsters at three locations: Oyster Factory Park, Eagles Field and Oscar Frazier Park to assist citizen debris removal efforts.
- Work with Beaufort County public works to establish priority service areas within greater Bluffton and represent town with Beaufort County public works in debris removal activities.
- Ensure procurements, contracting and public works functions are properly conducted and documented to ensure reimbursement for FEMA eligible expenditures.

This division worked 24/7 during the storm and is the face of our town throughout the rest of the year.

If you see any of these fine employees, remember to thank them for always doing their best to keep our town in the fantastic shape it is in.

Contact Town Hall at 706-4500 or email Lisa Sulka at lsulka@townofbluffton.com.